

The Course of the Anglican/Roman Catholic International Commission's Discussion on Authority

by

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In its 'Malta Report' of January 1968 the Anglican/Roman Catholic Joint Preparatory Commission submitted to its respective authorities the recommendation that there should be an examination of the urgent and important "question of authority, its nature, exercise, and implications". At the same time it recommended a similar examination of the questions of intercommunion, Church and Ministry. Its recommendations were accepted by Pope Paul VI and the Vatican, and by the then Archbishop of Canterbury and the Lambeth Conference of the same year.

At the first meeting of the Anglican/Roman Catholic International Commission at Windsor in the January of 1970 a decision was taken to divide the Commission, for part of the time, into three groups, one of them concentrating on the question of 'Church and Authority', while the other two groups dealt with 'Church and Ministry' and 'Church and Eucharist'.

Papers providing a basis for an exploration of agreements and differences on the question of authority were provided by Bishop Christopher Butler, OSB, Bishop Edward Knapp-Fisher and Dean Henry Chadwick. (These papers had been commissioned at an informal meeting in Dublin during May 1969 prior to the final formation of the Commission itself.) Bishop Butler concentrated on the question of the location and quality of 'official' authority in the Church (presupposing its existence alongside that of expertise and charisma). In the Roman Catholic view there were occasions when the formulations of ecumenical councils or popes might not be discarded as false; Nicea's "consubstantial" being an example. Though such a decision was non ex consensu, it was nevertheless the articulation of the mind of the whole Church. Bishop Knapp-Fisher (with a Roman Catholic consultant, Fr. Edmund Hill, OP) examined the question of 'Fundamentals'. Areas of agreement and disagreement were explored in relation to the problems of: 'Revelation and Faith', 'Scripture and Tradition', 'Church and Authority' and finally 'Dogmatic Definitions and Comprehensiveness'. Dean Chadwick set the specific question of Christian authority in the wider context of the current debate on authority in general and (following Max Webber) he discerned patriarchal, functional and charismatic categories. An antithesis between evidence and authority as the ground of belief

was eschewed both in the general and more specifically Christian discussion. Nevertheless there were differing emphases between Anglican and Roman Catholic exercises of authority; a preference for a diffuse "indefectibility", on the one hand, and a unitative organ of "infallibility" on the other.

After discussion in the sub-commission a draft schema on 'Church and Authority' was presented to the full Commission. Significantly this schema was divided into two major sections: 'Church as Koinonia' and 'Koinonia and Authority'. All three sub-commissions were asked to prepare fuller drafts in preparation for the next meeting of the Commission in Venice during the September of the same year.

Bishop Butler and Dean Chadwick were responsible for convening the 'Church and Authority' sub-commission which was to be based in the United Kingdom. It was agreed that all the sub-commissions might co-opt help from outside the Commission itself and, acting as Secretary, Dr. John Halliburton encouraged a number of theologians to contribute short papers on the themes of the Windsor draft. These included a re-examination of the concept of infallibility by Fr. Edward Yarnold, SJ.

At Venice where the Commission's Second Meeting took place, the Windsor schema on 'Church and Authority' was discussed at length, elaborated and amended. The resulting Venice paper on 'Church and Authority' spoke jointly of the Church as the People of God, a community, entrusted with the task of preserving and witnessing to the doctrine and fellowship of the apostles. The local churches shared the same word and sacraments and were constituted a single universal family. The chief bond of unity, both local and universal, was the apostolic ministry of oversight. Apostolic faith, sacraments, and ministry were thus deemed to be constitutive of the Church. Authority was to be located in the tradition of the Christian community of which the Scriptures were the supreme document. Creeds and councils required both consonance with Scripture and reception by the Church. Ecumenical councils could not be reversed. Bishops were the normal teachers in the Church and their president endowed with a special dignity.

There then followed two views of the koinonia and of authority in the Church. On the Roman Catholic side it was noted that Vatican II implied that perfect communion was preserved in communion with Rome. The episcopate exercised its responsibility in collegial fashion, either collectively, or through its president. When it did so in a decision formulating the once for all Revelation it was endowed with the charisma called "infallibility". On the Anglican side there was no claim to be

the unique embodiment of the Church. Anglicans shared with Roman Catholics the same fundamental doctrines, papal authority excepted. A Roman primacy of service was acceptable but the decrees of Vatican I and the application of the petrine texts to the bishops of Rome were not. Indefectibility was preferred to infallibility, the Church being granted continual correction, safeguarded from final departure from the truth by the Spirit. The proposed text of the Lambeth Conference of 1968 was quoted to the effect that it was fitting that the bishop of Rome should preside over the whole College of Bishops. Hesitations remained over the pragmatic exercise of papal authority but the papal office could be not only a sign of unity but a guarantee of diversity.

The sub-commission spoke with one voice again to note the primacy of Scripture as a possible basis of a hierarchy of truths. Even differences in the interpretation of papal authority might not necessarily be a barrier to communion as an interim stage towards union.

The decision was taken at Venice that it would be in the interests of Anglican/Roman Catholic relations to publish all three sub-commission drafts, in order to show the stage the Commission's work had reached and to invite comments and criticism. After the agreement of respective authorities, this was done simultaneously in "Theology", the "Clergy Review" and "One in Christ", during February 1971.

It was also decided that the pattern of the Commission's future work would be to take one of the three subjects at a time, beginning with 'Church and Eucharist'. After preparatory work by individuals, a sub-commission in the United Kingdom and National Commissions in South Africa and North America, the Third Meeting of the Commission at Windsor, in September 1971, completed An Agreed Statement on Eucharistic Doctrine. This was published in the December of that year. At the conclusion of the Windsor meeting, plans were made for continuing the Commission's work on 'Church and Ministry'. Papers were commissioned and sub-commissions convened in North America and the United Kingdom. The Fourth Meeting of the Commission took place at Gazzada near Milan in August-September 1972. At Gazzada the shape of the existing work was reviewed. United Kingdom, North American, and South African groups were charged with the preparation of material, and a further sub-commission was asked to meet in the United Kingdom to complete a draft document from this material in preparation for the next full

meeting of the Commission at Canterbury, August-September 1973. It was at Canterbury that the Statement on Ministry and Ordination was completed and published in December of the same year.

While a full discussion of the question of 'Church and Authority' had been postponed since the Venice meeting of 1970, the issues raised by it were never very far away from the surface in the discussions on the doctrine of the Eucharist and Ministry. Furthermore the methodology of the Commission had been established, a methodology which began by an examination of the present faith of the two traditions. The Commission had also learnt more of the value of the theological concepts of koinonia and episcopè. These would be invaluable tools in the unravelling of the most difficult of the problems dividing the two traditions: papal primacy and infallibility,

In the following year no less than 30 papers and memoranda were circulated, from individuals, sub-commissions and national commissions, as background material in preparation for the assault on 'Church and Authority'. The English Anglican/Roman Catholic Commission offered a paper on 'Infallibility and Indefectibility'; the former seen as an aspect of the latter. The South African Anglican/Roman Catholic Commission prepared material on the 'Authority of the Bible' and the 'Redemptive Authority of Christ'. An Oxford sub-commission convened by Dr. Halliburton and Fr. Yarnold, SJ, submitted work on 'Ecclesiology in the light of Vatican II'. The Church was seen as a "mystery" as fully present in its local manifestation as in the assembly of local churches in communions. Though the bishop of a local church could not act without reference to other local churches, this did not mean that the unity of local churches implied a uniformity of devotion, liturgy or theology.

Individual papers, by no means prepared exclusively by members of the Commission, covered a further wide area. This included the treatment of Scripture and ecumenical councils in Anglican thought, the dogmatic decrees on Revelation (Dei Verbi) and the Church (Lumen Gentium) of the Second Vatican Council, Magisterium in the Early Church, schism, the Petrine texts, and koinonia as a basis of ecclesiology.

Amongst individual papers those by Fr. Herbert Ryan, SJ and Fr. Jean Tillard, OP were of particular significance. Fr. Ryan had been asked at Canterbury to write on the dogmatic decree on the church (Pastor Eternus) of the First Vatican Council and there

was a detailed investigation of the Council's ascription of an "ordinary, truly episcopal and immediate power of jurisdiction" to the pope. This was then re-interpreted as essentially affirming that the question of a primacy of jurisdiction was to be answered in terms of the example of Peter. A final speculation was added as to how this might be embodied in a re-united Church, the model of "compulsory arbitration" being suggested as valuable. Fr. Tillard's paper was concerned with the sensus fidelium, which was not to be understood simply in terms of popular faith or devotion, nor reduced to conceptual categories. It was rather to be understood as the Word received and lived in the Church. The Magisterium was not exempt from participation in this process; its function, through "osmosis", was to serve the purpose of the Word by drawing out the objective content of the insights of the People of God.

The Commission also received the March 1974 Joint Statement of the United States Lutheran-Catholic Dialogue Papal Primacy and the Universal Church. This spoke of the possibility, in a united Church, of the recognition of a "Petrine function" of the bishop of Rome in relation to the unity of the whole Church.

The sixth Meeting of the Commission took place at Rocco di Papa, Grottaferrata, near Rome, during August - September 1974. The Commission divided itself into three sub-commissions. The first sub-commission, under the chairmanship of Fr. Yarnold, was to deal with 'New Testament and Authority'; the second, under Bishop Vogel, 'Ecclesiology and Koinonia'; the third under Dean Chadwick, 'Infallibility and Indefectibility'. At the end of the meeting, and after the cross-fertilization of comments in full session, the sub-commission produced three (incomplete) working papers.

The first sub-commission began with an extended preface defining the nature of authority. It then went on to speak of Christian authority in terms of the absolute claim of God upon man, instancing this from the Old Testament, but more particularly the perfect example of God's call and man's response in Jesus Christ. Through his obedience and exultation, Christ had been made Lord of the Church. The Spirit was seen as giving particular gifts for the building up of the Church and the discernment to recognise them. From the beginning it was also the Church's responsibility to discern the mind of Christ, fidelity to whom required obedience to the apostolic tradition and the necessity of its identification in the written records which became the

New Testament. Scripture was therefore recognised as both authoritative and normative. Its contemporary interpretation was the continuing responsibility of the whole community through the interaction of teachers, those in pastoral authority and the sensus fidelium.

The second sub-commission began with the assertion that the Holy Spirit constituted the koinonia, equipped the community for mission and safeguarded its faithfulness to the truth. Authentic Christian life disclosed the authoritative claim of Christ on man. Particular authority was given by the Spirit through ordination for the building up of the Body of Christ. The bishops' pastoral authority entailed the power of intervention for the sake of the community; however, all ministerial authority was to be exercised in mutual responsibility and interdependence. Even so the perception of the mind of Christ did not pertain exclusively to the ordained ministry, but rather to an interaction of all the members of the Church. There was a discernment of the insights of the whole community on the part of the ordained ministry and a response to, and assessment of, this discernment by the community.

The third sub-commission gave their working paper subtitles, beginning with 'Permanence in the Truth'. There was recognition that the Church was constantly called to penitence and reform under the Word but that the Spirit ensured that the Church would never cease to be the sign of salvation. There had been, and might be, situations where the Church's chief pastors, in interaction with the whole community, were obliged to give definitive answers to decisive questions. Such definitive answers required the gift of discernment, as did their reception. There followed a treatment of 'Unity and Diversity' which repeated the Venice suggestion that the papal office might not only be a sign of the former but also a guarantee of the latter. Then came the sub-commission's historical reflection on 'The Roman Primacy'. The Gnostic crisis led to a Catholic stress on the testimony of the apostolic sees; among them a special position was occupied by the Church of Rome through its relation to the apostles Peter and Paul. In later centuries the principal basis of the primacy was this recognition of Rome as the "apostolic see" par excellence. The further development of the primacy based upon the claim of the Roman bishops to be the successors of the apostle Peter, on the basis of the Petrine texts, was subsequently rejected by the churches of the Reformation. Anglicans were asked what was the maximum exercise and interpretation of the Roman primacy they

would find acceptable and Roman Catholics the minimum. The fundamental question was that of the basis of any common recognition of the Roman primacy. The Anglicans suggested as an answer a view of the primacy as arising divina providencia. There followed a note on the difficulties concerning papal primacy and infallibility as Anglicans saw them which ended by asking whether a primacy de jure divino was sufficiently high in the "hierarchy of truths" to prevent unity. Complementary to this were two Roman Catholic questions addressed to Anglicans. The first asked whether there was an authority in the Church which, in order to ensure permanence in the truth, could take binding decisions. The second asked for reaction to the statement that the supreme authority in the Church resided in the episcopal college, and could exercise its authority either collectively or through its president.

After discussion on the work of the three sub-commissions it was decided that four further papers were required. Bishop Knapp-Fisher agreed to ask the South African Anglican/Roman Catholic Commission to prepare material on authority in the New Testament, Fr. Tillard agreed to investigate primacy, Dean Chadwick infallibility, and Fr. Duprey to ask Professor G. Alberigo (of the University of Bologna) to submit a study on the theology of jurisdiction. It was also agreed to hold an informal meeting at the turn of the year to reflect upon existing material, and to revise and consolidate the work of Grottaferrata (in particular the working papers of the first and second sub-commissions which possessed a continuity of style and methodology with the two previous Agreed Statements). The Commission further agreed to hold a formal sub-commission meeting, in conjunction with the steering committee, in June of the following year to continue the work begun at Grottaferrata. It was felt that a serious treatment of the local church and its bishop was essential if the question of councils, primacy and infallibility was to be seen in perspective. This interim meeting would, hopefully, be able to offer the full Commission a composite and extended draft dealing with the question of authority up to, but not including, the question of primacy and infallibility, thus leaving the next meeting of the full Commission to grasp this nettle.

In the December of 1974 the informal meeting to consolidate the material of the previous autumn duly took place at the home of Bishop Alan Clark at Poringland, Norwich. There thus emerged a document of four paragraphs incorporating the major insights and concerns of sub-commission one of the Grottaferrata

meeting (but excluding its prefatory definition of authority). The Poringland draft spoke of the Lordship of Christ, the authority of Scripture, the authority of the ordained ministry and the inadequacy of all human authority. These themes will be recognised as those of paras. 1, 2, 5 and 7 of the present document and the actual text of the Poringland draft is indeed substantially to be found in all but paragraph 5.

In the following June the more formal sub-commission/steering committee met in London to attempt a continuation of the extant material. The work of the South African ARC on "Authority in the New Testament" had been circulated by this time, as had a memorandum on "The Nature and Exercise of Authority in the Church: Notes on the implications of Anglican formularies and theology" by Bishop Henry McAdoo.

At the St.Katharine's meeting (the group met at the Royal Foundation of St.Katharine) the Poringland draft was taken as a beginning. Nevertheless important paragraphs on the authority of the Christian community vis a vis the world, the authority within the Church of holiness and special gifts, and of the sensus fidelium were interpolated and the Poringland paragraph on the authority of the ordained ministry replaced. (The paragraph on holiness and special gifts was entirely new but the remainder of this material owed not a little to the draft of the second sub-commission at Grottaferrata.) Finally the logic of the document was taken further by the addition of two paragraphs concerning the koinonia among local churches (reflecting the work of the Oxford sub-commission of 1974) and its expression in councils and collegiality. Thus the St. Katharine's schema eventually totalled nine paragraphs. These correspond to paragraphs 1-9 of the Hengrave document. During the course of this meeting the outline shape and logic of one possible treatment of authority began to emerge with some degree of clarity. This pattern is now seen in a more developed form in the section and paragraph headings which preface the Hengrave document.

The Commission met in full at Oxford during August-September 1975 with the St.Katharine's draft before it, presented by Fr. Georges Tavard, AA, and the papers requested at Grottaferrata. Professor Alberigo's study of jurisdiction made the point that the term was far from univocal; its origin was to be found in the pastoral and sacramental realm.

Fr. Tillard contributed a stimulating paper entitled 'The Horizon of the "Primacy" of the Bishop of Rome'. The First Vatican Council's clear teaching that the "truly episcopal" jurisdiction of the pope in no way conflicted with the jurisdiction of the local bishop was seen as having fundamental significance. There was a difference in the usage of the term potestas ordinaria. The understanding of primacy had to begin with the local rather than universal Church. For the ministry of the local bishop to be authentically Catholic, both in relation to his own Church and the universal Church, communion with the centrum unitatis was necessary. Thus the unique episcopal function of the protos of the episcopal college was to guarantee the catholicity of all the local churches. Dean Chadwick's memorandum 'Truth and Authority' delineated truth in terms of the salvation of man in Christ. The organs of authority were primarily the Scriptures, the creeds, the liturgy, the ministry and the common consensus of all believers. The functioning of authority in the early church was to be seen in synodical and conciliar activity, culminating in general councils duly received by the Church and the great sees of apostolic foundation, pre-eminently Rome. (The petrine texts were however never universally accepted as the basis of this primacy.) A consequence of the modern definition of infallibility might well be the diminution of "ordinary magisterium". The Anglican tradition agreed with Rome that the Church could not err fundamentally, but thought of indefectibility rather than infallibility, and of a multiple authority. Infallibility needed to be disentangled and demythologised; it affirmed the objective character of divine truth and (emotively) a gift enabling the bishop of Rome, under certain strict conditions, to speak in such a way as not to formulate positive truth in a way which would be permanently disastrous.

The Commission scrutinised the St. Katharine's document but refrained from a detailed revision, as it was not yet complete. There was also considerable discussion of the major papers on primacy and infallibility. It was resolved that the Commission should work in two groups: one under the chairmanship of Bishop McAdoo to pursue the question of infallibility with the theme 'Truth'; the other under the chairmanship of Bishop Clark to do the same for primacy with the theme 'Unity'. The 'Unity' sub-commission was asked to continue the line of thinking of the St. Katharine's draft, though its membership was not co-terminous with that group.

The 'Truth' sub-commission envisaged their material as

following that of the eventual work of the 'Unity' group which was itself to follow the St.Katharine's draft. After reference to the full Commission at various stages, a 'Truth' document of twelve paragraphs emerged. It was declared that the Church would endure and have the continual duty of guarding and proclaiming the saving truth of Christ. In formulating the Church's faith, the Scriptures and their summary in the creeds were basic, together with the testimony of prayer and worship, preaching, councils and the consensus of the faithful. The Church had the task of interpreting the Gospel in contemporary terms and looking back through the tradition to the witness to Christ in the Scriptures. Such renewal and reformulation was itself historically dated, and yet the Church had so committed itself to some formulations that they had become an integral part of its faith. This did not imply, however, that churches would be free from error. The formation of the canon of the New Testament indicated the Church's awareness of its ability to make permanent judgements, the test of which was reception. Anglicans and Roman Catholics had used different language to designate irrevocable positions: "fundamentals" and "de fide" doctrines. In spite of the wider field of the latter, there was deep agreement and much in common. The "hierarchy of truths" indicated that some "de fide" doctrines were closer to the christological centre of the faith than others, and further theological investigation was required here in relation to the Marian dogmas and papal authority. Before the separation of East and West the bishop of Rome was seen as bearing a special responsibility in the universal Church in regard to the ratification of general councils. But in a disunited Church this role, which implied a power of judgement, in abnormal circumstances even without a council, was not clearly seen. The Roman Catholic Church taught that such an exercise of authority was legitimate in view of his headship of the episcopal college, but only in the light of the sensus fidelium, in consultation with brother bishops, and in conformity to Scripture. It was not a matter of personal inspiration but protection from error by the Holy Spirit. Anglicans still had grave difficulties concerning such an exercise of authority but the affirmation of the objective character of divine truth was a common reality. The work of the sub-commission was much indebted to Dean Chadwick's paper.

The 'Unity' sub-commission, also bringing its interim labours to the scrutiny of the full Commission during the meeting, added three paragraphs to the St.Katharine's draft. These dealt with the emergence of primacy as a particular form of episcopate, the

responsibility of the primate and the context of the particular primacy of Rome, and the historical pre-eminence of the see of Rome and its ancient and modern theological interpretation. In substance their text is to be found in the present document in paragraphs 10, 11 and 12.

At the conclusion of the Oxford meeting it was felt that both sub-commissions had reached the very brink of the problem of primacy and infallibility. As well as detailed discussion on the drafts, there was an extended debate on the work for the coming year, both sub-commissions having offered schemas for future work. Two areas needed further clarification: Anglican ecclesiology and papal primacy, and the meaning of such a primacy as an object of faith. Professor Eugene Fairweather accepted a Canadian responsibility for the former question and Fr. Tavard the latter. It was decided that the three documents before the Commission (the St. Katharine's, 'Unity', and 'Truth' drafts) should be examined with a view to their being put together as a composite whole. The 'Unity' draft followed logically from the St. Katharine's draft in any case, but the style and method of the 'Truth' draft differed significantly from both. A suggestion of an informal meeting, similar to the one held the previous year, was accepted. Following the pattern of the previous year again, it was also decided to hold a larger and more formal sub-commission meeting, in conjunction with the steering committee, in the early summer. It was hoped that this gathering could take the Commission over the brink by continuing the work of the two Oxford sub-commissions and offer its next plenary meeting a complete draft on authority.

During February 1976 a small group met (at Poringland again) to attempt the first of the tasks requested at the Oxford meeting: the welding of the 'Truth' material on to the St. Katharine's/'Unity' document. To achieve homogeneity of style it was felt right to continue the logic of the St. Katharine's/'Unity' material, but to do so in the light of the 'Truth' document and to incorporate its insights. (A member of the 'Truth' sub-commission was included in the group at Poringland.) The result was a continuation of six paragraphs, which described the exercise of authority in matters of faith in the koinonia of the churches. The continuation first emphasised the general point of the centrality of koinonia in truth. There followed two paragraphs leading on from this to an understanding of tradition as "memory" and the prophetic interpretation of the unchanging truth in contemporary terms. Here there was a direct dependence on themes (and to a lesser degree the actual text) of the earlier 'Truth' draft. Next

came a statement of the consequential commitment of the Church to decisions of permanent value and again 'Truth' material was explicitly re-worked. The logic then led to the particular historical responsibility of the bishop of Rome in this process, both in the endorsement of councils and in personal intervention. Finally there was a treatment of the safeguards of truth in the interaction of the sensus fidelium and the bishops (in respect of their responsibility for discernment) which gave ecumenical councils a unique quality and authority. These six paragraphs are now directly reflected in Hengrave paragraphs 13-18.

The sub-commission/steering committee met at Hengrave Hall, Bury St. Edmunds, during the following June, with the intention of attempting to draft provisional material which would complete the Poringland document. First of all, however, there was some revision of the extant material in the light of comment and criticism from other members of the Commission and in particular Bishop McAdoo, Bishop Vogel and Fr. Tavad. There were two significant changes: an extension and footnote to paragraph 6 on the sensus fidelium with particular reference to the Anglican tradition of a dispersed authority, balancing the treatment of Vatican I in paragraph 12; and a rephrasing of paragraph 18 in order that it might be more congruous with the XXI Article of Religion "Of the Authority of General Councils". Three new paragraphs were then added concerning primatial authority, its collegial context and its interaction with conciliar authority; these are seen in paragraphs 19, 20 and 21. Finally a concluding paragraph was drafted, spelling out the implications of the whole document.

A HENGRAVE SOURCE CRITICAL APPENDIX

I	1	I Poringland 1 (GROTTAFERRATA I 7 & 5)
	2	I Poringland 2
II	3	St Katharine 3 (GROTTAFERRATA II 3)
III	4	St Katharine 4
	5	GROTTAFERRATA II 4
	6	GROTTAFERRATA II 5 & Hengrave
IV	7	I Poringland 4
	8	St Katharine 8 (Oxford 3 & 4)
	9	St Katharine 9 (Oxford 5)
	10	OXFORD II 10
	11	OXFORD II 11
	12	OXFORD II 12
V	13	II Poringland 13
	14	II Poringland 14 (OXFORD I 4)
	15	II Poringland 15 (OXFORD I 5 & 7)
	16	II Poringland 16 (OXFORD I 9)
	17	II Poringland 17
	18	II Poringland 18
VI	19	Hengrave (OXFORD I 11)
	20	Hengrave
	21	Hengrave
VII	22	Hengrave